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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that the philosophy and practical approach to child rearing in a given society reflect and perpetuate the values of that society. In China, until the mid-19th century, the socialization process was geared to producing young people for a male-dominated, class-oriented society. As the feudal system crumbled, more "modern" socialization methods and concepts were adopted from the West and Japan. Current childhood education practice reflects the philosophy of post-Revolutionary China. Basic features are: the assumption that people are infinitely educable; stress on the centuries-old value of "the large family"; training for self discipline and responsibility; and a new emphasis on theory and practice, respect for productive work, and learning from real life experiences. In China today children are viewed as an integral part of society. Consequently, early childhood education places great importance upon social and shared responsibility. In this context, the Chinese view individual variation as a social strength. The author draws contrasts between Chinese and American perspectives of childhood socialization, demonstrates how our values reflect our history as a highly competitive, individualistic society, and expresses hope that we can make our society and education less self oriented. A 63 item reading list is provided. (Author/GC)

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ASIAN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION

EARLY EDUCATION IN CHINA

AND

ITS IMPLICATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES



ASIAN AMERICAN BILINGUAL CENTER

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FORWARD

ASIAN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION is a continuing series of monographs intended to spark debate and action among those concerned about equal and quality education for all children in the United States. Topics included in the series range from preschool education in China and its implications for American early childhood education to the advocacy of a particular model for Filipino bilingual education programs in the United States.

The series was born as the result of the Asian American Bilingual Center's efforts to develop bilingual multicultural curriculum of relevance to classrooms throughout the country. Funded by ESEA Title VII in 1975 to produce educational materials for Asian American children of Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese and Samoan heritage, the Center initiated the publication of a national newsletter. The newsletter not only attempts to inform interested persons in the specific work of the project but also features a supplement which highlights a more general educational issue. Contributors have included Ling-chi Wang, Estela Pinqu, NVM Gonzalez and Itty Chan. Their articles have stimulated great interest among the one thousand readers of the newsletter. Thus, ASIAN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION was conceived.

In this issue, "Early Education in China and Its Implications in the United States," written by Itty Chan, is presented. Ms. Chan is a teacher in the Chinese Bilingual Program, Quincy School, Boston, Massachusetts. A specialist in early childhood education, Ms. Chan received her bachelor's and master's degrees from Lesley College and Columbia University, respectively. This monograph is only one of several she has written which have contributed to the art and science of educating young children.

The Center welcomes not only your comments and reactions to the series but also any articles which you may want to contribute. For further information write or call:

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Early Education in China and
Its Implications in the United States*

Itty Chan
Cambridge, Massachusetts

From June to October in 1973, I visited China, my homeland, to learn about the new society in general and about education and child rearing in particular. During my stay there I made extensive observations of little children in preschools, child care centers, stores, parks, on the street and in the home, and talked to their parents and teachers. I'd like to share with you my observations of and my reflections on socialization values and practice in New China. First I will present a brief historical background and discuss the Chinese view on child rearing and education. Then we will turn to a discussion of implications for the United States.

*Paper presented at the New England Kindergarten Conference, sponsored by Lesley College Graduate School of Education, Randolph, Massachusetts, November 19, 1976.

*Portions of this paper were first presented at the Third Biennial Conference of the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development, University of Surrey, England, July 16, 1975; "The Chinese Family and Child Rearing Conference," sponsored by SACU and the Polytechnic of North London, England, July 19, 1975; the Third Annual Conference of Black Child Development Institute, San Francisco, California, October 30, 1975; and the Seventh Annual Early Childhood Conference, University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire, May 15, 1976.

I. Child Rearing in China: Past and Present

Prior to Mid-19th Century. For hundreds of years, child rearing in China was (as it still is) a shared responsibility of the large family and the community. The young child was cared for by many adults and older children. During the so-called age of innocence before three or four, the Chinese child was treated with gentle affection and patience and often indulgence. Education was oriented mostly toward teaching obedience, respect, and consideration for others, and appropriate manners in relating to family members and relatives. From an early age the child developed a sense of awareness of other people and also began to learn that he/she was an integral part of the family whole and that his/her actions had social consequences for the family. Then from the age of four to the early teens, the child was considered to be in a period of immaturity and inexperience and underwent strict disciplining and sex-role training. Peasant boys worked in the fields from the age of five or six, doing tasks such as fetching tools, bringing in drinking water, tending farm animals, and learning farming skills under the father's supervision. Peasant girls also helped out in the fields during busy season, but their main tasks were at home -- baby sitting, tending the fire, cooking, washing, cleaning, and serving. The more secluded gentry girls also learned the domestic arts, but mainly for skill training rather than for actual functional responsibilities. Both peasant and gentry girls were prepared for their subservient role, to serve the families of their husbands as daughter-in-law, mother, and wife. Gentry boys and a few well-to-do peasant boys started in the one-room school at the age of five or six. Their school experience was marked by rote learning of the classics, severe discipline, and submission to authority, all preparing them to become ruling intellectual bureaucrats. Sons of craftsmen and some poor farm boys went into apprenticeships and, after years of child labor, learned a trade. In short, work induction and responsibility training started early, with strict role differentiation. The socialization process was geared to putting forth a new generation of young people to take their "rightful" place in a class-oriented, feudal society, one in which men who used the mind ruled those who used the hand, and women had only a life of three obediences to men. The unequal system of strict role stratification was based on the ideology of Confucianism and had helped to sustain the political, economic, and social system of feudal Old China for over 2,000 years.

Impact of the West from the Mid-19th to the Mid-20th Centuries. At the turn of the 20th century, the decadence of the declining Ching Dynasty (1644-1911), coupled with imperialistic aggression by Western powers, had crippled China and turned it into a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country. China was in turmoil. The old system was crumbling, and so were the underlying values for socializing the young. With the founding of the first republic in 1911, the new intellectual ruling class, many of whom had studied abroad, turned to the West in search of guidelines to form a new Chinese society.

Modern education,* equality of the sexes, and applying a Western scientific approach to doing things were among the primary issues. Books and articles questioning the place of women and ways of child rearing began to appear. There emerged also early forms of preschool education, predominantly for the educated intellectual class. These were originally modeled after Japanese nursery education to supplement early education in the home.** Later European/American kindergartens became the models, and many preschools were set up by Western missionaries. Many textbooks on child development and preschool education were being translated and written. Yet by 1931, there were only 829 kindergartens in China,*** so, for the most part, urban, educated women still stayed at home, and child care remained a shared responsibility of the women in the family. During World War II and the revolutionary struggle, one of the first child care centers was set up in the mountain town of Yen'an and was staffed mostly by peasant women who received their training on the job.**** Many of the early rural child care centers were set up by the local people to liberate women to work outside the home and to provide comprehensive child care and education to children, thereby making it a public as well as a shared responsibility of the community. With the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, such child care centers sprang up all over the country. They were, in the early stages, founded on the Chinese experiences with experimental programs during the war years. They also borrowed from Soviet child care programs and from translated Russian texts on early childhood education. In sum, the early development of preschool education and child care programs from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries borrowed much from Western examples, but the substance of socialization in post-dynasty China had not yet taken shape. Only later were socialization values gradually to be made explicit and coherent in line with the philosophical outlook of the new society.

Evolution of a New Direction. As mentioned earlier, with the crumbling of the old social system based on the Confucian ideology came the question of "socialization for what?" For nearly 100 years China was in a confused state, in search of a new social order, and the "for what" question could not be answered until a new direction was evolved.

To understand the evolution of this new direction, one must look once more to China's recent history. The period from the May 4th Movement in 1919 to the recent Cultural Revolution in 1966 was one long struggle to re-evaluate and reshape China's world outlook. The crucial May 4th Movement, a nationwide student demonstration against Western and Japanese

*This included the reform of the Chinese written language from the classical literary style to Pai-Hua or Spoken Chinese, and the establishment of a new Western style school system.

**Reference in Chinese 学前教育 高長明著 中华文化出版事业委员会 1958
Preschool Education, Published in Taiwan, 1958, p. 278.

***Ibid., p. 281

****Reference in Chinese 洛杉矶托儿所 沈元暉著 香港新民主出版社 1949
Los Angeles Child Care Center, published in Hong Kong, 1949

imperialism, not only raised nationwide awareness of the fundamental questions of reform of Old China, but also caused head-on debate between the newly emerged and opposed world outlooks: on the one hand, the outlook of pragmatism, which advocated an adaptive approach and an attitude of "tackling the problems as they come up and never mind the 'isms' and ideology"*; on the other, the new "totality" outlook, which insisted upon a totality of concepts for studying China's problems, taking up the challenge of Western influences in the context of China and revolutionizing China as a whole. In 1949 a new social order was founded on socialism, providing a new direction for the rebuilding of China. The socialist road has also pointed to the totality view of world outlook, going back once again to the fundamental questions underlying China's centuries old humanism, namely, "what is human nature?" and "how to govern?"**

Today the answer to the question of "socialization for what?" is an integral part of the struggle to clarify and synthesize China's socialist outlook. Socialization values and practice, as we have seen them, reflect both the accomplishments and the continuing struggle toward that end. There are four major points on what seem to me to be the continuities in China's present child rearing practice:

- 1) There is the same basic assumption that people are infinitely educable.
- 2) There is the same stress on the centuries old social value of "we the large family" in human relations. Today, however, the awareness of other people is no longer geared to role training and stratification of society, but is based upon social responsibility in human relationships.
- 3) Training for self-discipline and responsibility remains extremely important. Today, however, children are no longer taught to be "seen and not heard," but to be active, responsive and cooperative members of society.
- 4) The new emphasis on integration of theory and practice, on respect for productive work, on learning from real life experiences instead of ancient wisdoms, on training for physical fitness and self-reliance reflect the impact of Marxist theory and the influence of preschool models from the West.

II. The Chinese View on Child Development and Education

Now let us turn to a discussion on the Chinese totality view on child development and education by examining three fundamental questions: What is human nature?, Development for what?, and What kind of human environment?

*A saying by Hu Shih, who represented the pragmatist wing in the May 4th Movement.

**I am indebted for much of this discussion to Chung-Lu Tsen of the United Nations staff, Geneva, Switzerland.

What is Human Nature? When I was in Peking in September of 1973, a mother of three young children explained to me the following. She said: "Human nature is like a sheet of blank paper, and a child is open to influences from the environment. That is why it is important to have Zheng Mian Jiao Yu, or 'Position Education'." She was referring to the not yet developed potential in a child and the input of environmental forces in shaping a person's development. This view that human nature has to be developed is deeply rooted in China's fundamental outlook toward humanism. As far back as the 7th century B.C. humanism, not religion or supernaturalism, was the central force of Chinese civilization. During the search for a new social structure at the end of the Chou Dynasty (1100-770 B.C.), many schools of thought (known as the Period of Blossoming Hundred Flowers) began a great debate on humanism, centering on two questions: "what is human nature?" and "how to govern?" Concern for interpersonal relationships and social behavior became the ethical norm in China. Over the centuries, there were continuing debates among philosophers on the question of human nature. For example, over 2,500 years ago Confucius said: "By nature men are pretty much alike; it is learning and practice that set them apart."* His disciple Mencius said: "All men are born with an inclination toward goodness. It is only neglect and abuse of this innate goodness which leads men into evil ways."** A century later Hsun Tsu wrote an essay entitled "Human Nature is Instinctual," stating that human beings are born with instinctual senses and that human goodness (being kind, generous, just, responsible) is nurtured through education and the social environment.*** Whatever the philosophical debates may say of human nature, there has always been the basic belief that human nature can be shaped, educated, and enlightened by the human environment.

Furthermore, human development is seen as an organic process of education and re-education and repeated thesis and synthesis in a social environment. Closely related to this view of human nature and the emphasis on education is the philosophy of education by direct positive influences with an attitude of expecting and assuming the positive in children. For example, aggression is not expected in children, and aggressive, tantrum, or hostile behavior is seldom seen among Chinese children. To my question of whether there was any grabbing of toys, hitting, or fighting among children, the answer from mothers and teachers was "occasionally but not frequently." It was explained to me that they expect the children to solve problems and conflicts with reason. Adults set the example for the children, and the children for each other. If a child has hit someone, the adult or other children talk calmly to that child and persuade him or her to use reasoning to resolve future conflicts. This attitude of "Positive Education" seems neither to expect negative behavior from children nor to deny the possibility of such happening. When a negative behavior does occur, positive steps are taken to correct it. The Chinese seem to view life in terms of

*W.T. de Berry, ed., Sources of Chinese Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), Vol. 1, p. 23.

**Ibid., p. 88.

中國哲學史資料簡編 先秦部分下冊 中華書局

***Reverence in Chinese: 荀子性惡篇 第444頁
Hsun Tzu, "Essay on 'Human Nature is Instinctual'" in Chinese Philosophies: A Collection of Source Books, Early Ch'in Dynasty Period, Vol.2, p. 444.

maintaining "justment" and not attaining adjustment. "Justment" refers to the basic outlook on life, closely related to the ancient idea of a "universe in harmony" and also the concept of repeated synthesis in continuous human development.

This attitude of concentrating on the "right" and the "correct" and not worrying about the "wrong" and the "incorrect" can be seen imparted to the children. For instance, in one of the classrooms I visited, a group of three year olds were learning to count by beating a drum. A child was called upon to beat the drum, but had a hard time synchronizing the counting with the beating. No one laughed, nor did the child show any sign of becoming upset. After a few trials, the teacher asked the group to help with the counting. They did so in a supportive but matter-of-fact manner, then someone else went to take a turn at the drum. This healthy and constructive attitude of concentrating efforts on the learning task at hand without fear of failure is seen over and over again in little children and adults alike throughout the country.

The Chinese belief in human educability, coupled with their socialist ideology of a classless society, one that is without domination and elitism, has brought about nondiscriminatory popular education. Healthy children are not separated into groups of "gifted," "slow," "having a learning disability," or the like, thereby segregating a child's learning environment at an early age. Even crippled children are carried to school and attend normal classes. The Chinese emphasize the ways children are alike rather than unlike -- children are the same in their inquisitiveness, their quest for self-concept, their potential to become, including to become caring and socially responsible human beings. That is why a nonsegregated learning environment is important. The primary concern is to provide an education for every child and avoid the creation of an elite class. As a kindergarten teacher said, "It is more important for 'bright children' to love and respect their peers than to think of themselves as special." Why not special? This leads to our next question.

Development for What? What kind of human beings are the Chinese inspiring and educating their children to become? From my own firsthand experiences in China and from sharing in the observations of other visitors, I have come to see that little children in China are viewed as seedlings. Adults take an active role in nurturing the young child as a farmer does a seedling. The Chinese aim is to help the child to develop as a thinking, feeling, involved social being who is independent and cooperative and who can assume responsibility actively and participate in and contribute to the progress and continuing development of the society. There is a clear and direct connection between child rearing and the larger society and in turn the explicitly defined goals of both contribute to social cohesion and consistency.

There is a crucial concept in understanding the Chinese viewpoint on child development. This is the concept of the social self. In the West, when we talk about child development, we refer to the development of the "individual self" -- the child's sense of who he or she is and what he or she can do and so forth. In America little children can often be heard saying: "I am smart" or "This is mine" or "I can run faster" or "I want to 'share' alone!" In China, the focus is upon the "social

self" -- the child's sense of who he or she is in relation to other people and their interrelationships in society. This may sound like what we know as social development, but it is not merely learning to get along with others, or, as an American preschool teacher recently said, learning "to deal with others." Rather it is the sense of self as being an integral, intimate part of the group, an insider. In China, little children call each other "little friends" and adults "aunties" and "uncles," and one can often hear them saying "we little friends at the kindergarten" or "our uncle workers in the factory" or "we the large family do this and that." This sense of interrelatedness of people rooted in the Large Family concept derived from the pattern of extended family in China's past. However, the sense of "we the large family" has taken on a broader meaning of human bond, so that one thinks of oneself not merely as part of an extended family or clan but as part of a whole society. In short, there is a strong sense of "self in society." When people feel this belonging, they care and help one another as if they do so to themselves -- without the separation of "I" and "they," but simply with "we."

In China everyone is important but no one should be special. Looking back to the earlier question, why not? Because being special leads to elitism and domination and that was what feudal Old China endured. Today New China is striving to become a classless society in which everyone is important without having to be special. That does not mean that all the people need to be the same. People are not the same. They have individual likes and dislikes and abilities and can be different yet important in their individual differences. Individuality need not be lost where no one is special. By the same token, it is not necessary to be special or outdo others in order to be important. For the Chinese everyone is important and no one should be special because social justice and equality of people are the primary concern, and personal freedom (to do as one wishes) takes a place secondary to social responsibility. For Americans individual uniqueness and freedom of choice are the primary concerns; social equality takes second place to individual will. Thus being special is the way to self-assertion and personal betterment. The antecedents are reversed in the two outlooks.

In China, children are nurtured to develop an awareness of others, to develop a caring concern and a sense of being responsible for one another and to become cooperative and selfish-less social beings. It is important to recognize that when children in China learn to be selfish-less in society they do not become self-less. Furthermore the development of the "individual self" and the "social self" are not mutually exclusive. It is more a matter of emphasis, an emphasis congruent with the basic values of the society.

What kind of human environment nurtures the sense of social self and the values of selfish-less-ness and quality of people in the Chinese child? Here we refer to human environment in a broad sense, embracing all the direct and indirect social factors that may influence the development of a child. I have identified five characteristics in the Chinese child rearing environment.

First, the human environment is varied and less emotionally intensive than in the West. For one thing, child rearing is everyone's concern and not just that of the parents. No one would hesitate to express affection, or to speak to a child if she or he misbehaved, regardless of the presence of the parents. The bond of affection between parents and children tends to be extended to include other adults for the child and other children for the parent. This shared responsibility has always been an aspect of Chinese culture rooted in the extended family pattern. Today it is further developed into public responsibility advocated by the socialist ethic. It is reflected in the prevalence of quality publicly funded child care and preschool programs. When children are reared by many people and not just the parents, they do not only have more experiences in interpersonal relationships but also more role models for learning.

Second, children are an integral part of the society. They are full members of the society, as children of today as well as adults of tomorrow. They are not segregated from adult activities. Chinese parents take their children wherever they go and have them along all the time. If they go visiting friends, the friends are delighted to have the children and make a big to-do over them. No one considers children as a burden in mixed company. Children are treated with the same care and respect as other age groups. They are valued as children, significant in their own right. From an early age they take part in the society and learn to take on gradually increasing responsibility for themselves and for the group of which they are an integral part. They are taught to be aware of both their importance and their responsibility to the larger society. There is a popular children's song comparing little children in the society with a small screw in a machine: "...a screw might be small but it is needed in the work to construct the country..."

Third, the human environment places great emphasis on social responsibility and "to serve the people." Children are expected to love, care for, and help one another, to cooperate in work and play, and to become selfless and socially responsible from an early age. "To serve the people" is a moral value practiced in everyday life by children and adults alike. The concept is not unlike President Kennedy's call to "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." In the spirit of mutual help, children also look to one another for role models and effectively teach and learn from one another. It is common to see little children helping each other learn to button up clothes, hang up towels, fold quilts, and perform such tasks as rolling out mats for nap time and sweeping the yard. In kindergarten old timers often help newcomers to adjust to routine life in the center by showing the new children around and leading them through the new routine of group living. Children are also encouraged to instruct and help each other with classroom lessons and to point out mistakes and incorrect attitudes and behavior in human relations. It is important to note that criticism is not taken personally but constructively in an issue oriented manner. Socially unacceptable attitudes and behavior can be changed through persuasion and education. Reflecting upon and confronting conflicts within oneself and between people are considered a part of mutual help in learning and growing with one another to become socially responsible human beings. Out of the group experiences of helping one another and

working together, little children in China learn to function on their own and to take responsibilities for themselves and each other.

Fourth, people-to-people learning and first-hand experiences closely related to real life are the primary mode of learning and teaching. The Chinese say "life is education, society is school." They believe that education is a life-long process for everybody and that it must be about life and combine mental work with practical work. Learning by doing was the mode for the vast majority of Chinese peasants who learned from practical experiences in real life (one must keep in mind that in the past book learning was available only to a tiny group of elites). During the revolutionary year in Yenan (1937), Mao Tse-tung summed up the Chinese experiences and integrated them with Marxist philosophy, writing "On Practice," an article which was to become the basis of educational theory in China today.* He stressed that knowing -- from perceptual awareness to conceptual ideas -- comes from experience and is further developed through social practice (or the actual practice of knowledge with people in real life). In other words, his theoretical position is not unlike that of Piaget and other interactionists in that experience comes from the reciprocal interaction of a person and his or her environment, and that knowledge is a process of restructuring, moving from concrete to abstract, from simple to complex. But in addition, Mao Tse-tung not only emphasizes the role of social environment for acquiring experience and forming ideas, but also insists upon the need to verify, as part of the restructuring process, abstract thoughts in social practice -- that is, further practice with people and events. In educational practice this means the emphasis on people-to-people interaction and productive work for adults and children alike.

At school, group activities, especially song and dance performances, stage presentations, and dramatic play are a very substantial part of the curriculum. Learning material and playthings are considered merely as aids to teaching or often for transition periods between activities. This may seem like a preference for social over cognitive learning, but that is not the case. To the Chinese, the cognitive and social aspects of a child's development are never separate, and learning activities embody both objectives. For example, the ability to take the perspective of another person is learned not only in human relations and cooperative acts, but also in dramatic play, for instance, in the playlet about a little horse transporting his very first bag of wheat to a mill. The little horse learns to take the perspective of others and judge their advice accordingly: "Uncle Bull, the river is not as shallow as you said and it is not as deep as Little Squirrel said, I can cross now!" In the West, arrangement of the environment and provision of manipulative objects are considered essential for learning.

*Mao Tse-tung's thoughts have their origins in the history of Chinese philosophy, as well as in the philosophy of Marxism, and have been refined and developed through his experiences in revolutionary struggles alongside the people of the grassroots. His thoughts represent a point of view rather than some ready-made solutions to any problem. The confirmation of his insights into the people's real life experiences and his behavior as the model of a person who asks questions, who tries things out, and who does not think of himself as perfect have led to the people's trust and grateful appreciation of him as their wise leader.

Often the child is alone in the activity and is encouraged to explore, to discover, and to experiment in his or her own way. It is not the same in China. The Chinese child is encouraged to learn to take the perspective of others in human relations, to solve problems, to put ideas together, and to take responsibility collectively. In short, while the child in the West makes discoveries mostly with materials, the Chinese child makes discoveries mostly with people.

Productive work is another important aspect of educational practice. Little children in kindergarten are seen sorting beads or screws, putting flashlight bulbs on cardboard, folding crayon boxes, boxing chess sets, and doing real productive work. Often they have a vegetable garden in the school yard, cultivate the vegetables, and eat them on their dinner tables. The children know that their productive work counts and are proud of being contributing members of the society.

Fifth, on the one hand, the human environment imparts explicit social values of selfish-less-ness, social responsibility, and human interrelatedness to the children. On the other, it is a high regard for individual variation which is regarded as a human resource and the source of collective strength. A child's interests and aptitudes are assessed by observing the child in his or her daily life. The human environment is sensitive and responsive to where the individual child is in his or her thinking and feelings. The following is a story about how a father responded to and challenged his daughter's thought about an incident in the street.

One day on the street, Ku Mi (a five-year-old girl) saw a policewoman leading a crying child by the hand. "Why is that girl crying?" she asked her father. "She has lost her way and this aunt (the policewoman) is helping her to find her mother." Back at home Ku Mi made a drawing of what she had seen, at first with lots of tears streaming down the cheeks. "Why all those waterworks?" the father asked. "Does she need to be sad, if she thought about the police auntie being there to help her look for her mother?" Ku Mi thought for a while, removed the tears, and drew the girl with wide open eyes.

Perhaps someone would say the father shouldn't have interfered with his daughter's expressive art work or shouldn't have suggested how Ku Mi should feel. But he was perceptive about Ku Mi's thinking process and her struggle to understand the incident. While Ku Mi focused her empathy only upon the crying child, her father challenged her to think further and to look at the incident from the perspective of its total context. Now Ku Mi could understand not only the feeling of the crying child on the street, but also could recognize the role of the police-aunt in the picture and have confidence about people helping people.

We have just discussed and briefly examined Chinese child rearing in the light of the fundamental questions of "what is human nature?" development for what?" and "what kind of human environment?" I hope the Chinese example has shown us that socialization values and practice cannot be separated from the values of society. What we socialize our children to become is fundamentally related to what human environment we provide for them.

III. Implications in the United States

What implications does the Chinese example have for us, and more specifically for our education at this point in American history?

I think there are three major implications:

1. As in all crosscultural learning, which compels us to take a look inward at ourselves, the Chinese example compels those of us who have come to know it to reflect and to re-examine our own basic assumptions about human nature.
2. It also compels us to confront the fundamental questions that concern all of us, namely, "Education for what?", "What kind of human beings and what kind of American citizens are we educating our children to become?," and "What kind of society are we inspiring our children to build?"
3. It can also challenge us (and I hope it will you, as it did me) to envision how rich and wholesome the American culture could become if our society and our education put less stress on individualism and competition, and more emphasis on human interrelatedness and on the creation of a new human identity, integrating all of our multicultural human resources in this unique land of many peoples.

I will discuss briefly each of the implications in the American context.

What Are Our Views on Human Nature? Why is it important to know our own perspective? Professor Leon Eisenberg, chief child psychiatrist at Children's Hospital in Boston, said:

"What we believe of man affects the behavior of men, for it determines what each expects of the other. Theories of education, of political science, of economics, and the very policies of governments are based on implicit concepts of the nature of man. Is he educable? Is he activated only by self-interest? Is he a creature of such dark lusts that only submission to sovereign authority can save him from himself? What we choose to believe about the nature of man has social consequences."*

Exactly how have we come to view the nature of the young child in this country? Is the child born with "original sin" and must the "inner bad" be brought under control and the moral virtues given to the child? Or is the child born with "innate good" which must be allowed to unfold in a permissive environment? Or what? And how do we view human educability? Can a child's "nature" be changed?

*Leon Eisenberg, "The Human Nature of Human Nature," Science, Vol. 176, April 24, 1972, p. 124.

Let us also ask these questions. Can we glimpse the basic notions about human nature underlying Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, and Gesell's maturationist theory of child development? Can we also see the basic assumptions underlying the educational ideology of the so-called "traditional" classroom, or that of Froebel's kindergarten and A.S. Neill's Summerhill and the philosophy of open education?

How about the mechanistic concept of human nature in our scientific age that tends to conceive of "human beings as objects to be studied scientifically and to be known objectively, in the same way that inorganic things can be studied and known by the physical scientists."* How often do we find this mechanistic view of human nature in child studies, in educational and other social science research and programs?

Perhaps one needs to recognize that "human nature is not Nature but History."** What we have chosen to believe about human nature reflects our cultural heritages and our history in the making: the idea of the "inner bad" has its roots in the history of the Christian religion, dating back to the Middle Ages; the idea of "innate good" has its roots in the philosophy of Rousseau (1712-1778) and the Romantic School of thought in Europe; the mechanistic view of human beings is growing out of our highly technological and capitalistic society, in which the organic process of human development is sometimes mistakenly seen as machinelike with segmented parts, and in which people sometimes are viewed as commodities with price tags expressive of their use values.

The history of the United States is a history of a nation of immigrants, and we can recognize the roots of our multicultural heritage. But we are here together now, and we are all taking part in the making of American history. We must confront the question of what we shall choose to believe about human nature and take responsibility for the consequences of that choice for our society.

What Is Our Answer to Education for What? The Chinese example also compels us to confront ourselves with the question of education for what? What kind of human beings and what kind of American citizens are we educating our children to become?

Perhaps we need to ask this question first: what is the place of education in a society? In its broadest sense, education is a continuous process, and it may be considered the same as socialization. It serves to promote and maintain the values, attitudes, and characteristics of a given society. This is why we cannot talk about the process of education without also talking about the context of society in which the process is taking place. And we cannot ask the question about education for what objectives without also asking the question about education for what kind of society.

*Grace Lee Boggs, "The Changing Self Concept of the American People," paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Denver, Colo., April 11, 1975, p.7.

**Ibid., p.8.

Someone might ask -- why the question of society? Can we talk about education for the individual child? For his or her own development? Yes, we can. In fact that is what most of us seem to be concerned with most of the time -- the child's own unique physical, intellectual, social, and emotional development. But that is not enough. For a child does not grow and develop in isolation. Nor does a society consist of unrelated individuals. Education cannot just aim at the child's development as an individual without also imparting values and attitudes about how individual people should relate to one another -- in other words, about the human relations that are essential in a society. Someone might ask if that is what we try to do in the child's social development. Yes, indeed. But the question must go further. For a child's development is not a mechanical process that can be so segmented. It is an organic process. I use the word "organic" deliberately, to convey the sense of interrelatedness and interdependency of factors involved in human development. The child is a whole child, a whole human being. Furthermore we cannot talk about educating or socializing a child into a given society as if the society were static. Society is never static. It is in a continuous state of development and change. It is also an organic process, in which individual people live with one another and bring their individuality to the making of society. In short, education reflects explicitly and implicitly the social, economic, political, and psychological characteristics and qualities of a society. Education also shapes the direction of the society by contributing to its organic process of human relationships, including the bringing up of children and educating the next generation.

To illustrate what I mean about the place of education in an ever-changing society, perhaps we can take a brief look at American history. What was American society like in the past? How was education taking place? And what were the values and attitudes imparted to children?

In the early days, America was a new-found land and a "Promised Land." People came for different reasons, but all looked forward to starting their lives anew. Among them, the Pilgrims came not only for freedom of religion, but also brought with them the vision of a self-governing, democratic new life. The land was sparsely populated -- most people made a living from the land. The family was the basic unit of economic production. The settlers grew their own food, made their own clothing. Children learned the productive skills by observing their elders and by taking part in the actual work production. Most communities were small and closely knit. Children of various ages attended one-room schools and could learn from and teach one another. Their parents participated in town meetings where they could have direct input into governing their own community affairs. Education took place mostly at home and in the community where children learned not only production skills in real life, but also the evolving values for self-reliance and self-responsibility, for taking initiatives and for critical judgement, for honest hard work and community cooperation, and for freedom to make decisions about one's own life in the New World. These social values evolved and led to the American Revolution and to the creation of a new nation guided by the ideal of a "government of the people, by the people, for the people." It was an important step forward in human history in that the American people were no longer subjects of kings and queens, but had struggled to become, and did become, citizens of their new nation. It was an inspiring vision for

people elsewhere to follow. Education was then coherent -- it was about life in America and it was about building a democratic society in America. Education was for individuality (in the sense of self-reliance, self-direction, self-responsibility) and for creativity (in the sense of taking initiatives and solving problems).

Over the years America has grown economically into a highly industrialized and capitalistic society and politically into a representative democracy. The family is no longer the production team it used to be nor does it serve the same educational function for its children. Home is no longer the place where people work and learn together, but a place for people to go to from their highly specialized jobs or from their age-segregated schools. Urban living is complex and highly commercialized. Capitalism breeds competition and the profit motive. Representative democracy breeds remote participation and the delegation of political responsibility to politicians. Specialization of work breeds credentialism and careerism. Commercialization breeds materialism and conformity. In 20th century American society, people are highly mobile and many families are uprooted. The feeling of community is gone or is rapidly diminishing. Intergenerational education, that is, the formal and informal learning from one generation to another, is minimal if there is any at all. Children can no longer learn work skills or to assume responsibilities as they did in the past because there is no real work available to children, either at home or in the neighborhood community.

Life is no longer a coherent education for today's children. Instead, they have a curriculum in school for social studies, science, health education, physical education, home economics, field trips, and so forth, as well as the basic skills of reading, writing, and math. When they are not in school, there may be after-school activities to keep them occupied. There are also public programs, such as educational TV programs for children. All of these educational inputs are presented to the child in fragmented fashion. The child has to put the pieces together and to make some sense out of them. Today's educational experiences are difficult for the child to assimilate. To use Piaget's conceptual terms, I'd say this: if a child accommodates what he learns, he can only be a technician in what he has learned; if he can accommodate and assimilate it, then he has become the master of what he has learned.

To illustrate my point on the difference between learning from real life versus learning from specific curriculum, I will tell you the following story. First, let me relate a story from a French film for children entitled "Le Poulet" (or "The Chicken"), which has won many awards. The story is about a young boy in a French country town, who is very fond of a chicken his parents have bought for a planned dinner. The boy hits on the idea that if he can persuade his parents that their rooster is a hen, then they will be interested in its ability to produce eggs rather than meat. So he spends his piggy-bank money to buy eggs and each day he puts one in the hay next to the chicken. His plan looks as if it is succeeding until one day the rooster reveals itself by its morning crow. Last year I took my bilingual second-grade children to the Museum of Science in Boston. These city children saw some fertilized eggs and baby chicks in the egg hatchery for the first time. They were fascinated. A few of them had seen live chickens before at markets in

Hong Kong. Some had only seen pictures of chickens. I doubt that any one of them could have come up with the plan of the boy in the film. For the plan calls for a coherent understanding not only of the life cycle of the chicken, but also its relationship to food production and the meaning of food. It would be difficult for the city children to make all these connections in their minds.

Not only are educational experiences piecemeal and incoherent to children, but there is also a lack of cohesion between education in the home, the school, and the media. Often there are conflicting messages between what children see and what is preached to them. A British educator observed this phenomenon in England and remarked:

"What use is it to tell small children that they must be nice to each other, that they musn't push and shove and grab when all around them they see people doing just that because 'that's what life is like'? Why do we bother to talk about sharing, about being fair and considerate when a child leaves his playground to go with his mother to the supermarket to hear her having to complain about the price of a tin of beans, or in the evening listens to his father congratulating himself on his promotion at the expense of a colleague -- or sees a neighboring family evicted from their flat (apartment)? We seem to find it immoral to talk honestly to young children about society as it is, yet we are disinclined to reshape society to fit the description we give our children"

Perhaps because of the fragmentation and inconsistency in today's education, we tend to ignore or avoid the question of education from and for what kind of society. Instead we talk about education for competence, education for school success, education for self-actualization, or the like, without questioning further: "competence for what? "success for what?", "self-actualization for what?" Yet, social values such as competition, materialism, and individualism are often inherent in today's education. Take an example: last year, our second graders went on a field trip to Boston's Logan Airport. During the tour the guide explained what a hangar is, and said "A hangar is a place to repair aircraft, because they are very, very expensive to buy and we want to have longer use of them." Not a word about safety was ever mentioned! Clearly the guide's message was material values over the protection of human lives. Or, take another example: at a lunch gathering, a three year old wanted to take one of the last two cookies on the plate. Her mother said, "You had enough; any more cookies will make you sick," and she ignored the fact that no one at the table had had as many cookies as the little girl. The focus was placed upon the child's own welfare, not on consideration for others who shared the same meal. There was nothing wrong with the reason given to the little girl. Only the choice of that reason clearly reflected the social value we place on individualism.

*Zina Bazergan, "A Question of Child Care" in China Now, published by SACU, London, England, September 1974, pp.5-6.

Yet, the question of "education for what?" is there, and some people do not confront it. An Afro-American mother once said to me; "We used to want our children to grow up to be good-hearted and generous to one another, but now we, especially the upwardly mobile parents, want our children to be curious, competent, and successful." Some time ago, a Chinese-American parent also expressed his mixed feelings in this way: "I don't want my children to fight with other children or to be aggressive, yet I don't want them to be stepped on or to grow up feeling inadequate to cope with this competitive and aggressive world. How should I teach and guide my children?" Last year a consulting job for the CDA credentialing assessment took me to St. Louis where I observed a teacher in a day care center serving forty preschool children from various cultural backgrounds. I was very impressed with what I saw there -- the purposeful, orderly, and responsible learning behavior of the children, and the perceptive and supportive and helpful ways of the teacher in nurturing self-confidence, self-responsibility, self-direction, and consideration for one another in the classroom. Later I talked to the teacher and she told me that basic to her teaching is her own confidence in each child's potential to be trustworthy, to be independent, and to be responsible, not just for oneself but for one another in the group.

By relating all these stories to you, I have tried to make only one point. That is, we, the American people, are a diverse group with diverse views on education and society. That can be easily understood because historically we have come from different lands, with different cultural heritages. We are the product of our history. But history also tells us that while education reflects and seems to maintain values of a society, it also contributes to the shaping of that society. What is our resolution of the "education for what?" question, for our children and American history in the making? Where shall we go from here?

Creation of a New Human Identity. This question leads to the third implication the Chinese example had for me (and I hope it has for you). Seeing China has not only reaffirmed my hope and conviction concerning people--concerning our human potential for working together for common goals, our human potential for appreciating human interrelatedness, and our human potential for transforming ourselves through education. It has also challenged me to have a vision of what might become of American society if all of our multicultural human resources could work together to create a human identity and a new human strength. This will mean that we shall want to create a human environment for ourselves and our children in which the foremost value is found in how human beings relate to one another and in which we are all involved in something bigger than our individual selves.

Closing Comments

In closing, I'd like to say this: as the Chinese education is playing an important part in shaping Chinese society, so is ours, whether knowingly or unknowingly. Our society is our constant making and remaking. Our resolutions to our diverse views on what is human nature, on education for what, on what kind of human beings and American citizens we inspire and educate our children to become will all bear social and historical consequences. As Professor Leon Eisenberg said: "Man is not his own

chief product. . .The optimism about man's potential. . .is not determined by history but by the men and women who make history."*

I urge each and every one of us here to take the responsibility of making our history.

*Eisenberg, op. cit., pp. 127-128.

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